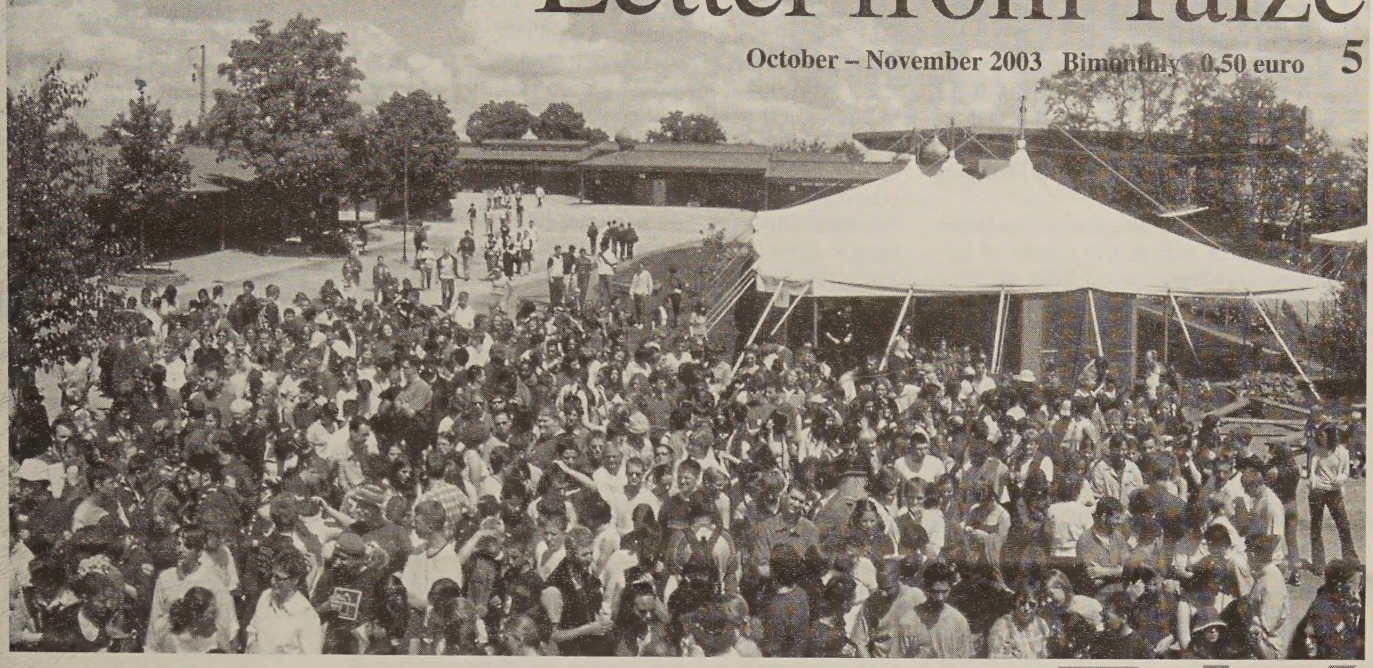
Letter from Taizé

October – November 2003 Bimonthly 0.50 euro 5



Taizé

29 December 2003 · 2 January 2004

hamburg

SUMMER IN TAIZÉ

# Walking on a Knife's Edge

PROCESSED
OCT 15 2003
GTU LIBRARY

see page 2/3

**Summer in Taizé involves dealing with a thousand and one challenges. Welcoming others often means encountering situations that go beyond all our attempts to find assurance or security.**

At the opposite extreme from "zero tolerance" for insecurity, it means trusting those who arrive and building bridges to what lies ahead, without knowing exactly what is going to happen. It means discovering in everything the joyful news of the Gospel, by means of a spontaneity sometimes buried too deeply in the anonymity of urban life but which requires little in order to burst forth.

Someone professionally involved in working for peace in international relations made this remark: more than ever, in a world marked by growing imbalances and relationships that are more and more asymmetrical, Christians, instead of contributing to the clash of civilizations, are called to keep walking on a knife's edge, poised between the opposite poles. They are called to remain in places where there is not a lot of assurance, where sometimes you have to consent to remain standing in an uncomfortable situation, where jolts are sometimes inevitable but where at the same time the best in each person can come to the fore. The Letter 2003, which served as a basis for small-group discussion in many of the topics offered this summer, concludes with this statement: "We may realize that we have been created to head towards something infinite, something absolute. And we can make this discovery: it is sometimes in demanding situations that human beings become most fully themselves."

## Spontaneous Acts of Reconciliation

Beginning in July, more than 25,000 young people visited the hill of Taizé. The diversity is sometimes so great in the largest weeks that the dividing-lines are no longer visible. There are acts of reconciliation that go almost unheeded, since they happen almost spontaneously in the give-and-take of the meetings. Each week, between eight and ten coaches went back and forth between Taizé and Romania, transporting Romanian-speakers as well as groups from the Hungarian minority that lives in Transylvania. Lithuanians and Latvians took part in the meetings together with Russians. Orthodox Christians from Eastern Europe lived alongside young Catholics and Protestants from the West. A few young Egyptian Coptic Christians were present at the same time as Chaldean Christians from Sarcelles, north of Paris. Young adults from Latin America who came to help with the or-

ganization of the meetings lived for a few months with Africans from some fifteen different countries and young people from Burma, Thailand, Indonesia and Cambodia.

To complete this picture of universality, this summer there were visits from two good friends, rabbis from Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, as well as a group of Palestinian Christians and young Muslims studying in North Africa.

How can we remain present on these dividing-lines, where the winds of opposition sometimes blow from all four directions? In speaking of the experience of Taizé, the Orthodox Christian theologian Olivier Clément often repeats: "This link between a deep spiritual experience and a creative opening to the world is at the heart of the meetings in Taizé, which have been centered for many years on the theme 'inner life and human solidarity.' This is the kind of Christianity we should be aiming at, for the more someone becomes a person of prayer the more they become a person who is responsible. Prayer does not set us free from the tasks of this world: it makes us even more responsible." (*Taizé, A Meaning to Life*, p. 46.)

## In Exposed Situations

Some workshops emphasized the need to remain present in exposed situations. Several times during the summer, it was proposed to reflect on commitments that could be undertaken to help with social problems. The reflection was based on a story of healing taken from the Acts of the Apostles: "I have no silver nor gold, but what I have I give you" (Acts 3:5-6). How can we help while having almost nothing? Where can we find the courage to be inventive, with no ready-made solutions, and sometimes without material resources in the face of those who do not fit into fixed social categories? A young Frenchman said, "One of the challenges that our modern society has accepted, in spite of everything that prophets of doom may say, is to feel responsible for those who are outsiders. As a social worker, like Peter and John in the story from Acts, there is the challenge to go out of the 'temple,' to 'leave' society in a certain sense, and to help those who are 'outside' to 'come back in.' Not by forcing them to adapt to preconceived forms of assistance, but by finding the strength to make society more and more inventive for those who do not fit into its categories. The joy of a social worker is to represent, in certain extreme situations, society's concern for those very persons who think that society has excluded them once and for all. Social workers help others to cross borders and by so doing make social categories more elastic."

During the month of August, a group of 64 young people from Timor took part in a week of meetings. During their stay in Taizé, they led a workshop entitled "Rebuilding a country: challenges and hopes a year after the independence of Timor Loro Sae." One of them explained, "I think that East Timor will be a developed country. This is a dream of our people. We were able to liberate our country, but now we have a great responsibility, for we have to liberate people from ignorance and poverty, too. The group here in Taizé feels responsible for seeking the development of our country. So that our dream may become real, we need people who are qualified in different fields, in order to face the future. We do not have impressive qualifications. There are many things we can do to contribute to the reconstruction of our country. One of the priorities is education. We want people to learn and we want education to be accessible to all. The health system is also very important, because it is essential for the quality of life of the population. We have come to study in Portugal to learn so that one day we can return to East Timor and help our nation to build its future."

Remaining on the knife's edge also means having the experience of forgiveness, of reconciliation. Another young man from Timor, who studies law in Portugal, said, "After the tragic events that took place in East Timor in 1999, many questions arose in our society. One of them concerned the need for reconciliation between those who supported independence and those who preferred to remain part of Indonesia. For reconciliation to be possible, we need justice. With help from the international community, we hope to overcome the difficulties and create a trustworthy legal system. The people of Timor have their values and their Christian faith, and we believe that these values and that faith will help us to establish peace, harmony and justice through reconciliation. We know that the road of reconciliation is the best way to build a future for East Timor."

Once the summer is over, the end of a stay in Taizé means going back to our daily life at home. What does it mean to keep walking on the knife's edge without complaining about the demanding situations offered by our societies? Olivier Clément, already mentioned above, offers this challenge to all who spend time on the hill: "Christianity must be creative, as in fact it has been enormously creative in history. So it is up to Christians to begin this creativity again and to continue with it in the world as it is, without lamenting the past. The world does not need Christians who are whiners; it needs Christians who are creators!" (*Ibid.*, p. 47.)

Taizé

29 December 2003 - 2 January 2004

**hamburg**

A team from Taizé, including young volunteers from different continents, sisters of Saint Andrew and some brothers of the community, is already active in Hamburg and the surrounding region.

Those who will be coming to the meeting from throughout Europe are also beginning to prepare themselves. This does not just mean planning the trip, but also entering into the spirit of a pilgrimage of trust: opening up to those nearby, making visits, taking part in times of prayer, and meeting with people involved in doing things for others.

## Filling Daily Life with Deep Joy

Teresa, 23, from Cologne writes, "During my last visits to Hamburg, what impressed me the most was the ruins of a church that had been almost entirely destroyed by the bombings of the Second World War. Instead of rebuilding the church after the war, the walls were kept as a reminder, a kind of call to peace. Today, those ruins create an amazing space of silence in the midst of a hectic city, a silence that allows you to enter into yourself and that invites you not to close your eyes to the events of the recent or distant past.

"At the end of the year, thousands of young people will gather in that city, and around that church, to pray, share and have fun together. The European meeting is a kind of multicolored and peaceful festival held each year, where young adults from very different countries come together and, despite their many differences, try to go beyond the conflicts that may exist. At the end of a year marked by so many wars and crises, these young Christians will offer with great simplicity a sign that peace is possible. I am happy that this will be happening in my country.

"Hamburg is a city of many faces. Its great size fosters anonymity, but also makes possible openness to people of all backgrounds. We are rich in Germany, and life is comfortable here. And yet, in such a city one is struck by the gap between rich and poor. The European meeting is an opportunity in this respect because the city will open wide its gates through the families and par-

Holy Spirit you are always present. Your presence is invisible but you live at the center of our soul, even when we are unaware of it.

**1 Sat** Mt 5:1-12 ALL SAINTS
Jesus said: Happy are the clear in heart, for they shall see God.

**2 Sun** Jesus said: I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live.

**3 Mon** Ga 2:15-21 Paul writes: The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

**4 Tue** Ezk 36:24-27 The Lord says: I will give you a new heart. I will remove the heart of stone from your bodies and give you a heart of flesh. I shall put my Spirit in you.

**5 Wed** Rm 12:3-8 Just as each of us has one body with many parts, and the parts do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, who are many, form one body, and each of us belongs to all the others.

**6 Thu** 2 Th 3:1-5 God is faithful, he will give you strength and protect you from the evil one.

**7 Fri** 1 Co 13:1-13 Even if I can understand all mysteries and know all things, even if I have the faith to move mountains, if I am without love I am nothing.

**8 Sat** Lk 5:1-11 Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Put out into deep water and let down your nets for a catch." "Master," Simon replied, "we have worked hard all night long without catching anything, but because you say so I will let down the nets."

**9 Sun** Is 32:15-20 God says: "Be still, and know that I am God!" The Lord is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge.

**10 Mon** Isaiah said: Once again the Lord will breathe upon us, the wilderness will become as green as the forest and my people will abide in peace.

**11 Tue** 1 Jn 2:3-11 Whoever loves their brother or sister lives in the light and need not be afraid of stumbling.

**12 Wed** Lk 16:10-16 Jesus said: "Up to the time of John the Baptist, it was the Law and the Prophets; from then onwards the kingdom of God has been preached and everyone is forcing their way into it."

**13 Thu** Col 2:6-13 Live your lives in Christ Jesus. Be rooted and built up in him, strengthened by the faith you have been taught and overflowing with thankfulness.

**14 Fri** 2 Co 1:3-7 Praised be God who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God.

**15 Sat** Ac 1:6-11 Jesus, risen from the dead, said to his disciples: You will receive the power of the Holy Spirit, and you will be my witnesses to the ends of the earth.

**16 Sun** Jesus said: Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

**17 Mon** Mi 4:1-3 Days will come when many peoples will come and say, "Let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, so that he may teach us his ways." And they will hammer their swords into ploughshares and their spears into bill-hooks.

**18 Tue** Lk 6:39-45 Jesus said: First take the plank out of your eye, and then you will see clearly in order to remove the speck from your brother's eye.

**19 Wed** Lk 4:1-13 Jesus said to the tempter, "It is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, him alone must you serve.'"

**20 Thu** Dt 30:11-14 Moses told the people: What I command you today is not too difficult for you nor beyond your reach. The Word is very near you, it is on your lips and in your heart for you to put it into practice.

**21 Fri** 2 Co 5:18-21 Paul writes: In Christ, God has reconciled us to himself and entrusted us with the ministry of reconciliation.

**22 Sat** Ex 14:5-31 Moses said to the people: Do not be afraid! Stand firm and you will see what God will do to save you today.

**23 Sun** Jesus said to Pilate: For this I was born, and for this I came into the world: to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.

**24 Mon** Is 55:6-11 Seek the Lord while he is near. Turn to our God, who pardons freely.

**25 Tue** Ps 118 In my distress, I called to the Lord. God heard me and set me free.

**26 Wed** Jn 21:15-19 A third time, Jesus said to Peter, "Do you love me?" Peter was hurt that he asked him a third time, "Do you love me?" and said, "Lord, you know everything; you know I love you."

**27 Thu** Jn 10:22-30 Jesus said: My sheep listen to my voice. I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one will snatch them out of my hand.

**28 Fri** Dn 9:18-19 Daniel prayed saying: Listen to the prayer of your servant. For we rely not on our good deeds but on your great mercy.

**29 Sat** Ps 119:33-40 Turn my heart towards your way, O God, and not to selfish gain. By your word give me life.

**30 Sun** ADVENT
Jesus said: Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away. Be on the watch and pray at all times.

These short readings are those read, day by day, at community prayer inTaizé. The Bible reference given indicates a slightly longer passage.

# NOVEMBER

# MEDITATING ON THE WORD

# DECEMBER

Ps 62

**1 Mon** Trust in God at all times. Pour out your heart to God.

Is 55:10-11

**2 Tue** The Lord says: As the rain and the snow come down from the sky and do not return before they have watered the earth and made it fertile, so is it with the word that goes out from my mouth: it will not return to me before it has achieved its purpose.

Jm 1:21-25

**3 Wed** James writes: Those who listen to the word of God but do not do what it says are like people who look at their faces in a mirror and, after looking at themselves, go away and immediately forget what they look like.

1 K 19:8b-13a

**4 Thu** Elijah waited for God on Mount Sinai. A great wind arose, but God was not in the wind. Then there was an earthquake, but God was not in the earthquake. Then came a fire, but God was not in the fire. After the fire came a voice of silence, and God spoke to Elijah.

Lk 4:1-13

**5 Fri** Jesus answered the tempter saying, "It is written, 'One does not live by bread alone.'"

Jr 33:14-16

**6 Sat** Days are coming, says the Lord, when I shall fulfil the promise of happiness I made to my people, and from among them I shall raise one who will do what is just and right in the land.

Mt 3:1-11

**7 SUN** John the Baptist came as the prophet Isaiah had said: A voice of one calling in the desert, "Prepare the way of the Lord. Make his paths straight."

Lk 1:26-38

**8 Mon** The angel said to Mary: Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favour with God. You will conceive in your womb and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus.

Mk 1:1-8

**9 Tue** John the Baptist said: After me will come one more powerful than I. I baptise you with water, but he will baptise you with the Holy Spirit.

Jm 5:7-11

**10 Wed** James writes: Be patient; do not lose heart, for the Lord's coming will be soon.

Ws 10:9-14

**11 Thu** The Wisdom of God led the upright along straight paths and showed them the realities of the kingdom of God.

Ep 3:14-19

**12 Fri** May Christ dwell in your hearts through faith, and may you be rooted and established in love, so that knowing the love of Christ, which is beyond all knowledge, you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

Lk 1:5-25

**13 Sat** The angel said to Zechariah, father of John the Baptist: Your wife will bear you a son who will be great in the sight of the Lord. He will be filled with the Holy Spirit and will bring back many people to the Lord their God.

Lk 3:10-18

**14 SUN** John the Baptist said to the people: Anyone who has two tunics must share with whoever has none. And anyone with something to eat must do the same.

Mt 24:42-44

**15 Mon** Jesus said to his disciples: Stand ready, because the Son of man is coming at an hour you do not expect.

Jn 12:20-33

**16 Tue** Jesus said: Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant will also be.

Jl 2:12-13

**17 Wed** The Lord says: Come back to me with all your heart. Come back to the Lord your God who is tender and compassionate, and rich in faithful love.

Lk 3:15-22

**18 Thu** John the Baptist said: I baptise you with water, but one stronger than I is coming and he will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and fire.

Rm 12:3-13

**19 Fri** Paul writes: When you give, give generously, from the heart; when you do works of mercy, do so with joy.

Ps 51

**20 Sat** Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.

Lk 1:39-45

**21 SUN** Elizabeth said to Mary: Blessed is she who believed that the promise the Lord made her would be fulfilled.

Ezk 3:10-11

**22 Mon** God said to Ezekiel: Son of man, listen carefully to all my words and take them to heart, then go to your compatriots and speak to them.

Heb 10:19-25

**23 Tue** Without wavering, let us hold fast to the hope we have and seek to stimulate one another in love and goodness.

Ba 4:36-37

**24 Wed** The Lord says to his people: Look and see the joy that is coming to you from God.

Lk 2:1-20

**25 Thu** CHRISTMAS
The angel of the Lord said to the shepherds: Do not be afraid. I bring you news of a great joy, a joy to be shared by all the people: today a Saviour has been born to you, he is Christ the Lord.

Mt 10:17-22

**26 Fri** St STEPHEN
Jesus said: When you are handed over, do not worry about what to say or how to say it. What you are to say will be given to you when the time comes, for it is not you who will be speaking but the Spirit of your Father will be speaking in you.

1 Jn 1:1-4

**27 Sat** St JOHN
Life itself became visible, we saw it and testify to it. We proclaim to you the eternal life which was with the Father and was revealed to us.

Lk 2:41-52

**28 SUN** When Mary and Joseph found the child Jesus in the Temple, he said to them, "Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" And his mother treasured all these things in her heart.

Mt 6:31-34

**29 Mon** Jesus said: Strive first for the kingdom of God and God's righteousness. Do not worry about tomorrow.

Rm 12:1-13

**30 Tue** Do not model yourselves on the pattern of this world, but let yourselves be transformed by the renewing of your mind so that you may discern the will of God.

Is 49:13-26

**31 Wed** Shout for joy, you heavens; earth exult! For the Lord is consoling his people and having compassion on his afflicted ones.

Christ Jesus, even when you were overwhelmed with trials, you did not threaten anyone; you forgave. We too would like to be capable of forgiving, while remaining in great simplicity of heart.

MEDITATING ON THE WORD

# Opening Up to Those Nearby

More than 300 parishes and congregations in the greater Hamburg region are getting ready to welcome the young adults who will come to take part in the European meeting. For several weeks now, local preparation groups, involving all the generations, have begun their work.

ishes that offer hospitality, sharing their homes and their time. In a society strongly marked by individualism and efficiency as well as by personal success and profit, the residents of Hamburg will run the risk of giving something without expecting anything in return.

"After a year spent in Germany, an Italian friend told me that he saw us as people who always look straight ahead, without turning or blinking. Another French friend told me that we Germans cannot live without order and punctuality. The meeting, and already its preparation, will require us to turn our heads, to look towards our neighbors. It is not just a matter of opening our doors to those who will come from far away, but also of coming closer to our neighbors, to those who in the district are going to share the best they have and in this way experience a richer life together. For us, who love order, it will also be a good experience to discover, in the 'organized chaos' of the five days of the meeting, the positive side of spontaneity and the unexpected.

"It is not easy for us young people to feel at home in the churches. With our longings and our questions, we are sometimes not taken very seriously and not well integrated. In school, religion class is often replaced by ethics. Many are put of by stiff Sunday worship services. They are looking for a more personal and more accessible form of prayer. The European meeting will help people to discover the vitality of Christian faith in the midst of the city and will show that the young Christians of today are not trying to run away from the world, but to live the happiness of the Gospel that can fill daily life with deep joy."

## Practical Details

**Arrival**: Monday morning, 29th December 2003 between 7am and 12 noon.

**Departure**: Friday afternoon (after 12 noon), 2nd Jan. 2004

**Accommodation**: either with families or in school and church halls. It is essential to bring a camping mat and sleeping-bag.

**General programme for 17-29 year olds**: Participants will be welcomed by families and local church communities throughout the Hamburg region. There will be morning prayer each day in the neighbourhood where you are staying. Then meetings in small groups with other participants and with local people. Each day — midday and evening — there will be two common prayers in large halls for all participants of the meeting together. In the afternoon: workshops on various themes. There is also the possibility to spend the five days of the meeting in silence (separate accommodation).

**Helpers/Choir** (option open only to young adults between the ages of 17 and 29): Those who would like to help organise the meetings in the neighbourhoods, to be team-leaders for practical tasks or to be in the choir group, should arrive if possible on Saturday 27th December, between 8am and 3pm (arrival not possible on 28th December). Some places in these teams will also be open to participants who arrive on 29th December.

**16 year olds** may come to the meeting only if accompanied throughout by an adult over 20, with each adult accompanying no more than two 16 year olds. Arrival: 29th December — not before.

**Adults over 30:** the meeting is intended primarily for young adults under 30 and not for older people unless they are leading a group of young people. We ask older adults (over 40) to consider sponsoring a young person to come from a church, chaplaincy or school in their area, instead of coming themselves. Adults over 30 all participate in the main group, arriving on 29th Dec. (not before). If you cannot accept the same simple accommodation conditions as the young people and need a "real bed" please indicate this when you register.

**Families with children** (minimum age: 7 years), and people with a disability who need special accommodation should contact Taizé — best by telephone in October or November — to arrange this.

**Your contribution to costs** is made on arrival. Young people from English-speaking countries will be asked to contribute approx. 80 Euros for the whole meeting. As well as the hire of meeting-halls and equipment, this covers all meals and a public transport pass. Adults leading groups of young people can contribute the same amount, other adults over 30 are asked to contribute the double.

**Also bring:** a small FM radio with earphones which can receive frequencies between 88 and 108 MHz. Translations at prayer times and for many of the larger meetings will be by radio.

**Travel:** Special Coaches from the UK Contact: "Skyliners", 02476 325682 / 328410 Freephone: 0500 481111; Fax: 02476 354626 email: taizebookings@skyliners.co.uk Or use existing rail, air or scheduled coach services to Hamburg.

From other countries: Contact Taizé to learn of groups being arranged by air and by coach.

**Register** by 1st December. Participants from English-speaking countries can use the same on-line registration form as for the meetings at Taizé, mentioning "Hamburg meeting" in the *Comments* box.

## Should we regret our sins?

When the apostle Peter realized what he had done by denying Christ, he "wept bitterly" (Matthew 26:75). A few weeks later, on Pentecost day, he reminded the residents of Jerusalem how scandalous it was that Jesus, an innocent man, was executed. "Hearing this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, 'What are we to do, brothers?'" (Acts 2:37). Regret clings to wrongdoing like a shadow we can get rid of only with difficulty.

Regret is ambiguous. It can make us sink into despair or lead to repentance. Disappointed in himself, Peter could have despaired. There is a "worldly kind of sorrow that brings death." But recalling Christ's love for him changes Peter's tears into "God's sorrow, that ends in repentance and salvation with no regrets" (2 Corinthians 7:10). Regret for him was a transitional stage, a narrow gate that led to life. Sorrow that leads to death, on the other hand, is the vexed regretting of someone who only trusts in his or her own capacities. When these are found to be insufficient, such individuals begin to feel contempt and even hatred for themselves.

It may be impossible to repent without feeling some regret. But the difference between the two is enormous. Repentance is a gift from God, a hidden activity of the Holy Spirit that draws a person to God. I do not need God to regret my mistakes; I can do that by myself. Regret keeps us focused on ourselves. When I repent, however, I turn towards God, forgetting myself and surrendering myself to him. Regret makes no amends for the wrong done, but God, when I come to him in repentance, "dispels my sins like the morning mist" (Isaiah 44:22).

"To sin" means "to miss the mark." Since God made us so that we may live in communion with him, sin is separation from God. Regret can never liberate us from this distance from God. If it leads us to withdraw more into ourselves, it can even bring us further away from God and thus intensify our sin! As Jesus put it in words that remain somewhat enigmatic, sin is "that they do not believe in me" (John 16:8). The root of sin, the only sin in the deepest sense of the term, is lack of trust, not opening ourselves to the love of Christ.

A woman came to see Jesus one day. She was weeping, and washed his feet with her tears. Whereas others were scandalized, Christ understood and admired her. That woman regretted her errors, but her regret was not bitter; it did not paralyze her. She trusted and forgot herself. And Jesus said, "Her sins, though they were many, have been forgiven: she has shown much love" (Luke 7:47). On the strength of these words, she had nothing to regret. Who could regret having loved greatly? By the grace of God, our sins can lead us to love more. And then regret should turn into gratefulness: "Give thanks for everything at all times" (Ephesians 5:20).

## What is original sin?

Ever since life appeared there has been the enigma of death. In the animal world death may seem natural, but for human beings it has always been a question. Why do those we love go away for good? We want to have a happy life, without our happiness suddenly coming to an end. For this reason, since the beginning of time the longing for a happy life has given rise to different representations of a "golden age" when "everything was still fine." The stories that deal with this topic attempt to explain how death appeared in the world.

The Bible draws from these traditions. The Book of Genesis begins by celebrating the original goodness of creation (chapters 1 and 2). Then it brings the troubles of life, especially death and fratricidal violence, into relationship with wrongs committed at the beginning (chapters 3 and 4). But what is striking in the Biblical account is that these original sins are identical to our own sins: the refusal to trust in God, telling half-truths to justify oneself, projecting one's faults on others, not taking responsibility for one's acts. Without answering the question of why evil exists, the Book of Genesis turns the responsibility over to each reader. We are Adam or Eve, Cain and Abel.

In the New Testament, original sin becomes a more explicit concept. For the apostle Paul, Adam represents the unity of the human race and Adam's fault means that, insofar as sin is concerned, there is no difference among human beings: "All are subject to sin, as it is written: Not one of them is upright, not a single one" (Romans 3:9-10). But Paul is only interested in Adam because this enables him to speak of the impact of Christ, which is just as universal, or even more so, than the contagion of sin: "If death came to the multitude through the offense of one man, how much greater is the effect God's grace has had, coming to so many and so plentifully as a free gift through the one man Jesus Christ" (Romans 5:15).

Speaking about original sin is thus a way of saying that salvation is universal before being individual. Christ did not come to snatch a few individuals out of an evil world, but to save humanity. All are sinners, their hands empty before God. But God offers the gift of his love to all. "God, in Christ, was reconciling the world to himself" (2 Corinthians 5:19). What Christ did "brought justification and life to all humanity" (Romans 5:18). No one, by their own abilities, can find a way out of the blind alleys that are the common destiny of all humankind. But through Christ humanity is saved, and each person can then welcome this salvation into his or her life.

Jesus referred to original sin in his own way: "From the human heart evil intentions emerge: sexual immorality, theft, murder..." (Mark 7:21). And yet he did not condemn very much; he was compassionate. When we become aware that every human being experiences the wound of sin, perhaps we too become more merciful. In the steps of Jesus, we are called to bring healing rather than to denounce pitilessly. It is not a question of downplaying the seriousness of evil, but of knowing that there is no sin that Christ did not come to take away by giving his life on the cross.

# JOHANNINE HOURS

November: Isaiah 52:13 – 53:12

The reader who discovers this "fourth song of the Servant" today is seized with astonishment at this detailed account, written several centuries in advance, of what Jesus accomplished by giving his life on the cross.

It confirms that Jesus was part of a line of believers who discerned the fulfillment of God's will in a different direction from the coming of a political messiah or other-worldly mysticism. God invites us to recognize his plan and take part in it in the midst of a world wounded by violence.

The excessive evil that overwhelms the victim mentioned in this passage is such that it leads him to be condemned and rejected by all. Everyone runs away from him, or else they defend themselves by claiming that he must have been responsible for what happened to him. But, by his attitude, the victim resists this interpretation. He refuses to identify those responsible with what they have done. He condemns no one and does not complain. He is thus the only one who is free and untouched by violence. He is utter patience. His lack of threats allows us to recognize our running away, our refusals and the violence we are a party to. His peace and his expectant waiting not only undo the knot of our semi-conscious complicity with evil, but also give us an impetus to act.

Recognizing that we do not wish the evil in which nonetheless we are involved becomes a powerful motivation for orienting ourselves. Welcoming the trust offered to us by responding to the expectations of others opens a way for us leading to light and life.

In this way, the paradoxical means God chooses to accomplish his plan is revealed. He attempts neither to seduce, to convince, nor to impose himself. His servant becomes vulnerable, exposed to incomprehension, at the mercy of those he calls. By undergoing this trial, he frees us from the fears that paralyze us and awakens the best of what is within us: only the gift of his life is fruitful.

- In whom can I recognize the "suffering Servant" today?
- What does it mean for me to collaborate with God's justice, with God's will to liberate?

December: Mark 15:39

Seeing how Jesus died, the centurion, who was standing in front of him, said, "This man was truly Son of God!" (Mark 15:39)

How could it happen that, in Mark's Gospel, the Roman officer responsible for the execution of Jesus is the first one to recognize and to proclaim that he was Son of God?

This professional accustomed to using force in military campaigns and missions to keep order knows that, in dealing with violent people, it is necessary to be strong and self-controlled. Otherwise, you collapse or you lose control of yourself and cannot ensure peace and security.

This soldier also knows that death is the ultimate test of truth. There, everybody is equal. Masks fall. Some flee into delirium or withdraw into themselves; others are blinded by rebellion. The centurion sees Jesus living for others and for God until the very end. If this crucified man remained kind to his executioners until the end, to whom could he have been unkind? He is innocent. He did not give in to the provocations of those who were expecting to see him yell in pain. He put up with the shouts, the insults, the slaps, without accusing or cursing anyone. To resist suffering in this way while remaining open to others, you must be strong, stronger than the fear of death!

He did not become the enemy of his enemies. By letting his attackers go to the end of their violent logic without replying in kind, he detached them from the evil they were doing.

One must have powerful motivations to drink to the end such a cup of suffering. Who ever heard of a man who was so good to his enemies that he sacrificed himself for them? Only God can send his rain and his sun on both the good and the wicked. Only God can love everybody, even his enemies. Jesus knew God loved him to the very end as his "one and only" (Luke 23:46). He was the Son of God!

- Where do I find the motivation to go through crises?
- How does the passion of Jesus shed light on my own journey?

Johannine hours are meant as a way of seeking God in silence and prayer in the midst of our daily life. During the course of a day, take an hour or so to read the Bible passage with the short commentary and to reflect on the questions which follow. Afterwards, a group of 3 to 10 people can meet to share what they have discovered and perhaps for a time of prayer.

# Togo and Benin

## A Way of Mutual Support

*Two of the brothers, one of them a Togolese national, the other living with other Taizé brothers in Dakar, Senegal, recently visited Christians in Togo and Benin:*

We travelled the length and breadth of Togo, from the capital, Lomé, in the south to the frontier with Burkina Faso in the north. In the west, we were almost in Ghana, while to the east there is Benin, where we concentrated on visits to Christian communities in the capital, Cotonou, and in the south.

What was striking everywhere was the enormous vitality of the Church—its sheer dynamism. The last ten years or so, there has been an extraordinary growth in the number of new Christians, and this development seems set to continue in the coming years in both of these countries where the majority of people practice the traditional religion with its adoration of numerous fetishes. The transmission of the Christian faith is a fairly recent phenomenon here. It dates back hardly more than a hundred years. After many trials and a long crossing of the desert—especially in Benin during the recent Marxist-Leninist regime—the Christian faith is bursting forth all around.

In less than ten years, a parish in one of the suburbs of Lomé, and which originally stretched over a huge area, has set up eight "stations," each with its own place for prayer. Each station has become a new parish, so greatly has the number of new Christians increased. This same pattern can be found in many places, especially in urban situations that are expanding rapidly. Often the churches, built quickly with poor materials, resemble huge hangars made of wood and corrugated iron. But inside, what fervour in the faith of the people! It is not unusual to find several hundred people at daily Mass at 5.30 or 6 in the morning, with wonderful singing. Some groups even come half an hour early in order to pray together and prepare for the Eucharistic celebration. With the rapid increase in the number of newly baptised and people preparing for baptism, one of the pastoral priorities for the churches in Togo and Benin is setting up small grass-roots Christian com-

# www.taize.fr

### Asian Youth Day

The third Asian Youth Day brought together 800 young people from 20 Asian countries, from 9 to 16 August, in Bangalore, India. One of the brothers took part.

**http://www.taize.fr/en/enplgsa.htm**

### Americas: meetings in 2004

A new stage of the pilgrimage of trust on earth will take place at the University of Saint Paul, in Ottawa, Canada, from 6 to 8 February next year. Other meetings in Canada will be announced shortly. Plans are afoot for a meeting in El Alto, Bolivia, in May and in Brazil, the next "Jornada de Confiança" will take place from 4 to 7 September in Goias (to the West of Brasilia).

**http://www.taize.fr/en/enplgamr.htm**

### New communities in Cambodia

One of the brothers was in Cambodia recently: "For three weeks I traveled through a large part of the country. Visiting new communities was a bit like reading the Acts of the Apostles: people studying catechism, people finding their way; each stage on the journey had its own particularity, but always brought together several young adults from small communities from within a radius of two hours by road. The meeting place was chosen because it was central."

**http://www.taize.fr/en/enplgcam.htm**

### A visit to Guinea Bissau

"The Church in Guinea Bissau is not large in terms of numbers, but it is important through the influence it exercises in favour of peace and reconciliation." One of the brothers, accompanied by a young Senegalese just back from a year in Taizé, recently made their first visit to this small West African country. Many contacts were made and they have been invited to make a second visit next year.

**http://www.taize.fr/en/enplgafr.htm**

### In Thailand

From 29 to 31 August, young adults from Thailand met in Suan Santitham, at Lumsai, a centre offering hospitality both for AIDS patients and for retreats. Many of the songs are very well known in Thai and the meeting aimed to deepen people's understanding of various aspects of prayer in the style of Taizé: repetitive singing, silence, and simplicity.

**http://www.taize.fr/en/enplgap.htm**

munities in the neighbourhoods. Another is the formation of lay leaders, especially catechists and people to take charge of prayer groups.

At Cotonou we spent several days with those responsible for youth ministry in the diocese. Each summer for the last five years, they have sent two or three youth leaders to Taizé, to take part in the intercontinental meetings and to share their own experience with others there. Among the signs of hope lived out by young people in Cotonou are what is called the "schools of faith" and the "schools of prayer." Every year during the summer, over one hundred young adults involved in groups in their parishes take part in a two-week training program. The aim is to enable them to serve their communities better, with greater competence and discernment. These training sessions have been given the name "schools of faith." Young leaders who have already taken part in this first experience are invited to take part in a "school of prayer," which offers a possibility of going further on a spiritual level. Each year, some fifty youth leaders take part in this time of formation.

In Togo, we met most of the bishops, including the Archbishop of Lomé. The welcome they offered us was so fraternal and very simple. We were able to talk with each of them at some length. Togo was going through a difficult period of political and social tension and we were able to tell each bishop how much we had been touched by their courage several months previously, when they expressed together and publicly the conditions necessary for an enduring peace in their country.

We also met lay people from various Christian denominations who, in the same spirit as the Togolese bishops, a not afraid to accept the consequenc for their daily lives of the choices th have made in terms of truth, justic love and liberty. These people are sig of hope for the future of their country.

In the pilgrimage of trust on earth our stay in Togo and in Benin was a wa of mutual support, lived in prayer an sharing.


*Brother Roger of Taizé*

## God Is Love Alone

A new book in which Brother Roger brings together the essentials of his thinking. Apart from the main themes which lie at the heart of Taizé – trust, simplicity, joy – *God Is Love Alone* also includes personal accounts of events or people that have left their mark on the author and the Community.

published in the UK and Ireland
by Continuum
ISBN: 0826470203

CP = Continuum Publishing
The Tower Building
11, York Road, London SE1 7NX.
Tel: 01202 665 432; Fax: 01202 666 219
www.continuumbooks.com


# Letter from Taizé


Annual subscription
**Ordinary subscription:** 6 (France 4,5) Euros
**Supporting subscription:** 10 or 20 Euros

Means of payment:

- by **credit card** *Visa, Mastercard, Eurocard, Carte Bleue* send the number of your card and dates of validity to Taizé and say what sum in Euros you wish to transfer.
- by **international Giro transfer** in Euros addressed t Lettre de Taizé, CCP 20041-01007 -0061446M038-71 CCP LYON 614 46 M.
- by **cheque** in Euros to Lettre de Taizé, F-71250 Tai Communauté, made payable through Société Générale.

In certain countries it is possible to pay **within the country**
**Australia**: $12 - Letter from Taizé, P.O. Box 76 North Sydney, NSW 2059
**Canada**: $10 Letter from Taizé, c/o Lesley Santiag 145 College Circle, Ottawa, Ontario, K1K 4S1.
**New Zealand**: $15 - c/o Jenny Chisholm, 13 Arde Way, Wilton, Wellington.
**UK**: £4.50 - Letter from Taizé, c/o Nick and Jan SHIELDS, 42 Blenheim Road, St Johns, WAKEFIELD, W Yorkshire WF1 3JZ.
**USA**: $7 - Letter from Taizé, c/o Bruder, P.O. Bo 1954, Lenox, MA 01240.
For Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Den mark, Finland, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Netherland Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain and Sweden write to Taizé to ask for the address in your country.

**Asia**: The Letter from Taizé can also be obtained in th following Asian countries. Contributions towards th cost of photocopying and postage will be most we come.
**India**: Letter from Taizé, c/o Brothers of Holy Cross, 4 St Mark's Road, Bangalore 560 001.
**Korea**: English edition. Ordinary Subscription: 2,00 Supporting Subscription: 4,000 to: Letter from Taize c/o Hwa Gok Dong 105-51, Kang Seo Ku, Seou 157-010.
**Philippines**: Letter from Taizé, c/o 28 San Antoni Street, San Francisco Del Monte, Quezon City.
**Bangladesh**: Letter from Taizé, P O Box 48, H.P.C 2200, Mymensingh.
**Cambodia**: Fr. Sri Pramong Virachai, BP 123 Phnor Penh.
**Hong Kong**: Ingrid Chan, Flat H, 14/F, Tower 125, 1 Po Yan Street, Sheung Wan.
**Indonesia**: Sister Be Kien Nio, Biarawati Ursulin, Jl Anggrek 60, Bandung 40114.
**Japan**: Isao Uematsu, c/o Yoda, 6-43-5 Shimoshakuji Nerima-ku, Tokyo 177-0042.
**Malaysia**: Tiong Marcella Lee, No 33 Lot 201, Jalan S Maong Bahru, 93150 Kuching, Sarawak.
**Pakistan**: Yaqub Sadeq, Catholic Church, Toba Te Singh.
**Singapore**: Angela Lee, 79 King's Road, 268141.
**Sri Lanka**: Martin Costa, 31 Major Lalaka Fernand Mawatha, Kapuwatte Ja-Ela.
**Taiwan**: Anna Tang, Aurora Center, N° 9, Lane 71 Hang Chow S. Road, Sec. 1, Taipei, ROC.
**Thailand**: CYO, 122/6-7 Soi Naksuwan, Nonsee Road Yannawa, Bangkok 10120.

Correspondence: Letter from Taizé,
71250 Taizé-Communauté, France
e-mail: letter@taize.fr www.taize.fr
News from Taizé by email twice a month free of charge
www.taize.fr/taizenews.htm

Lettre 232 – DRA V. Rogeaux – Com. par. 0105K79608 – DL 990
Ateliers et Presses de Taizé